



Final \$17 million for Union Station means rehabilitation can move forward on new train, bus station in Springfield

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By **Jim Kinney, The Republican**



Two views of Union Station in downtown Springfield; the way it looks today, on top, and an artist's rendering of what it will look like when it has been renovated, below.

SPRINGFIELD – The final \$17 million in federal money for **Union Station** fell into place Tuesday and the Springfield Redevelopment Authority plans to start demolition on the project in October or November.

The first phase of the **Union Station Regional Intermodal Transportation Center** is expected to be open in late 2014.

"I think it is just a very, very, good announcement," said U.S. Rep. **Richard E. Neal**, D-Springfield, Tuesday afternoon. "Union Station has always been an anchor for the northern blocks of downtown. It has a distinguished history and a lot of nostalgia."

And a future, **Neal** said. There is a separate but related \$78 million federal project that will improve passenger rail service north and south through Springfield from Vermont south to New Haven, Conn. That service will bring passengers and business to the new Union Station.

Construction on those rail lines in Massachusetts will begin in July, said Timothy W. Brennan, executive director of the **Pioneer Valley Planning Commission**. Rail work should be done by 2014. The state is also studying future improvements to the east-west Boston-Worcester- Springfield rail corridor.

Neal said U.S. Secretary of Transportation **Raymond H. "Ray" LaHood** told him of the \$17 million Tuesday morning. The money is to be official in July.

In a written statement, Springfield Mayor Domenic J. Sarno said the rail projects and Union Station improvements will put the city at the center of the regions transportation network.

"Revitalization of the landmark station will yield a 21st Century, state-of-the-art regional intermodal transportation facility, and will enhance the economy and quality of life within the city, the Pioneer Valley and beyond. Again, we are most grateful for this grant and the opportunity it provides," Sarno wrote.

Union Station was built in 1926 and closed in 1973. It has been owned by the city since 1988.

Kevin M. Kennedy, the city's chief development officer and until December a Neal staffer, said the \$17 million is the final piece of the \$45 million total project. The Springfield Redevelopment Authority already have \$28 million in state and federal money in hand.

Kennedy thanked Gov. Deval L. Patrick for making Union Station a top priority in the states' request for federal transportation funding.

The first task will be to demolish an unusable 100,000-square-foot baggage warehouse on the Main Street side of the building. Construction will begin in March of 2013. Plans call for the construction of a 200-space parking garage with 23 lower-level bus berths on the lower level. That parking garage will go where the baggage warehouse is located now.

"This funding from the Obama Administration will transform Union Station into a hub of economic opportunity," Gov. Deval Patrick said in a prepared statement. "It's a game changer for Western Massachusetts and the entire commonwealth.

"The lieutenant governor and I pushed for it because we believe investments in infrastructure are all about the future. I know that President Obama and his team agree, and we thank them for recognizing the value of this project and the value of investing in Western Massachusetts," he said.

The Springfield Redevelopment Authority will also acquire an unusable parking garage located across Frank B. Murray Street, demolish it put in a surface parking lot and four additional bus berths.

Kennedy said the Springfield Redevelopment Authority will also restore the exterior and interior Great Hall of Union Station and create ticketing areas for Amtrak, the Pioneer Valley Transportation Authority city buses and for Peter Pan Bus Lines.

Kennedy said Springfield Redevelopment Authority will restore the tunnel from the station to Lyman Street and will put in a new elevator to the trackside passenger platforms.

Robert J. Schwarz executive vice president of Peter Pan Bus Lines said Peter Pan has committed to move its bus operation to the new building. Anything beyond that has yet to be decided.

Schwarz also wouldn't comment on how a redeveloped Union Station might fit in with a possible casino in the neighborhood.

When asked about a casino Kennedy said: "Maybe, we'll see where those casino plans go."

But the new Union Station is going to happen, Kennedy said.

"It's something the people in the Pioneer Valley can expect to happen. It is no longer a plan," he said.

The \$45 million will not cover the second phase of redevelopment which includes retail space on the Dwight Street side of the building, Kennedy said.

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